



FILM: **WORTH**

FDG RATING: 3.8 ☺☺☺☺○

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Sara Colangelo: *director*
Michael Keaton: *actor, Ken Feinberg*
Stanley Tucci: *actor, Charles Wolf*

DATE: October 24, 2021

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **WORTH**

Based on Kenneth Feinberg's memoir "What Is Life Worth?", the film stars Michael Keaton as DC lawyer, Kenneth Feinberg, who actually requested, pro-bono, to manage the hastily created September 11th Victim Compensation Fund. In the film, he is appointed the role of special master of the Fund, which the federal government established after the attacks to limit lawsuits against the airlines. The fear was that potential lawsuits could sink the United States economy. Feinberg had two-years to get potential plaintiffs to sign on and in the process, define the project's parameters, begging the question of whether it's possible to reduce a life to a dollar value and would that dollar value be equal for each life affected?

According to Feinberg, after Sept. 11, he confronted the challenge of placing a value on human life by calculating different amounts of compensation for each and every victim. The law required that he give more money to the stockbroker, the bond trader and the banker than to the waiter, the policeman, the fireman and the soldier at the Pentagon. He explains that this is what happens every day in courtrooms throughout our nation. Our system of justice has always been based upon this idea — that compensation for death should be directly related to the financial circumstances of each victim, estimating how much money each victim would have made in a full lifetime. Victims and families were also compensated for pain and suffering, in addition to other monetary damages. Once a family accepted Feinberg's offer, they were not allowed to appeal.

Keaton expertly portrays Feinberg's procedural, detached personality as he focused on his task and calculations even while meeting with grief stricken and often angry families. Feinberg clearly underestimated the grief of the bereaved, he barely gets a word in at his first town hall with the victims. Enter Charles Wolf (outstanding performance by Stanley Tucci), a widower, whose wife was on the 97th floor when the Twin Towers were hit. For Wolf, compensation is about justice. Wolf launches a website and organizes a separate group that demands changes to the fund's compensation structure. He challenges Feinberg to see beyond the numbers, hands out flyers, and attracts a following who respond to his emotional, compassionate nature. Wolf's first demand was to extend the timeframe people had to seek medical treatment after the attack in order to qualify for compensation. Thanks to his efforts, the period increased from 24 hours to 96 hours, and his fight grew much wider in scope.

We all agreed that the acting was excellent and that the film was very enlightening, explaining the Fund's formation, how it is managed and telling the story about the two men at its core. One discussion participant was disappointed that there was so little back story about the wealthy victims since we never see their families and only see the lawyers who represent them. Another discussion participant pointed out that this was such a defining moment in the history of our country, the story is compelling, but a lot to absorb. An especially memorable scene is the family of Mexican immigrants, gathered in the interview room, who expressed thanks at their good fortune to receive \$2,000 to divide among them. One resident reviewer commented that the film turned a complicated situation into a formulaic drama and that the film might have been more compelling if it focused in depth on a single case. Most of us were not at all familiar with the Fund so the film was effectively educational.

We appreciated that the director uses restraint to keep the faces of figures who will die in the attacks just out of view as they leave their spouses for work the morning of Sept. 11. She doesn't re-create images of the burning towers except in a reflection in Feinberg's train window. A lengthy pan gradually reveals the size of a wall of missing-persons posters.

We calculated the film's worth at 3.8, a fairly generous cumulative score on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best).

Footnote: After giving the fund his seal of approval and agreeing to join its ranks, Wolf continued his advocacy work on behalf of families of victims of the 9/11 attacks. Years later, when a utilities truck sucked a skeleton out of a manhole near the crash site, Wolf asked then-mayor Bloomberg to restart the search for remains. He provided guidance on the redevelopment of the Ground Zero site and has acted as an ongoing spokesperson for family members of victims during meetings with senators, presidents, and foreign officials.



See you at the movies!

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